



Testimony before the Program Review and Investigations Committee
By Louise Feroe, Senior Vice Chancellor, Connecticut State University System
Monday, March 1, 2010

Thank you Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Louise Feroe, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs for the Connecticut State University System (CSUS). You are considering a number of bills of particular interest to us.

First, regarding House Bill 5164, *An Act Implementing the Recommendation of the Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning the Alignment of Postsecondary Education and Employment in the Green Industry*, I commend you for your interest and commitment to green jobs and the Connecticut economy. I was very pleased to testify before this committee during the development of your report, and I am pleased that a number of your recommendations are now moving forward as proposed legislation. On this bill specifically, you will be hearing from Bill Leahy of the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University. Bill will share his expertise in sustainability and our views in support of the initiatives outlined in the legislation.

Second, regarding Senate Bill 268, *An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Program Review and Investigations Committee Establishing a Pilot Program to Reward Institutions of Higher Education that are Meeting Established Goals*, I would say that since our Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Chancellor are statutory members of the Higher Education Coordinating Council, they certainly look forward to working with Commissioner Meotti and our colleagues on the Council to develop appropriate measures and identify the most feasible pilots. As you know, we place a high value on coordination and collaboration, because we believe it is beneficial to our students and our state.

I'd like to spend my remaining time discussing House Bill 5165, *An Act Concerning High School Graduation Requirements*. Let me first offer you some context. This year, for the first time in our history, CSUS set all-time records for the number of full-time undergraduate and full-time graduate students in the same year. Our total enrollment now exceeds 36,000. Most important for this discussion, especially when so many of Connecticut's young people are leaving our state, is the fact that 86 percent of our graduates stay in Connecticut after graduation, to pursue their careers, raise families and contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life in Connecticut.

We also take tremendous pride in the work we are doing with the business community in Connecticut, responding to the workforce needs they have today, and anticipate having in the years ahead. And we are taking concrete steps to develop academic programs that respond specifically to their needs, and their concerns.

Along the lines of coordinated planning and programs, let me first mention the new Dual Admission program launched last fall by the Connecticut State University System and the Connecticut Community Colleges. The goals are simple but substantial: to make the transfer of credits from community college to university easier, to better advise students at the community college level so that they will take courses that will transfer, and to provide students with the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree after completing their associate's degree.

This program should save students time and money, and most importantly encourage them to continue their education – and in doing so broaden their career prospects and earning potential. That is good news for the students, and for our state.

We are also seeing great results with our Bridges program, which specifically deals with college readiness and establishes academic connections between our universities and local high schools, as well as middle schools. Many of you are familiar with this initiative, which began at Western and is now being implemented at each of the universities, in response to specific local needs. For example, Western, working with Danbury and Bethel since 2005, has seen a reduction of 53% in participating students requiring remediation in math and 90% in those students requiring remediation in writing. The percentage of students placing into writing remedial courses, among those in the Bridges program, dropped from 61% in FY2005 to 6% in FY2009.

All of which brings me to the proposal to strengthen high school graduation requirements. The bill before you certainly moves in the right direction, and you are not alone in advocating new requirements to help our students succeed.

Numerous national studies underscore that the most important factor ensuring that students are academically successful in college is the quality and intensity of the high school curriculum, and even academic work before high school. Satisfactory completion of an array of rigorous courses taken in an appropriate sequence is by far the most determining factor for admission, persistence and completion of a college degree. Educational systems across the nation are addressing these issues, and Connecticut would ignore this at its own peril.

I am very pleased to report that the Board of Trustees of CSUS understands these issues very well, and is leading the way in addressing them. As you may know, we are committed to continuing our work with local school districts and other key constituents to assure that more of our students, whatever their background, are prepared for college level studies, so that they can successfully compete in the global marketplace and fully realize their potential while making a commitment to Connecticut.

In fact, the CSUS Board of Trustees voted last year to strengthen the academic admission standards for our institutions – Central, Eastern, Southern and Western Connecticut State Universities. These new standards are scheduled to become effective in 2015. By doing so, we will not only be helping our students academically but financially, saving them money by reducing the need for remedial classes, improving retention, and increasing our graduation rates.

Let me outline our new requirements, and point out where they differ slightly with what is proposed in this legislation. The new CSUS requirements include:

- 4 years of English, including composition
- 4 years of Mathematics, including Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra 2
- 3 years of Science, including two laboratory science courses
- 3 years of Social Studies, with U.S. History required
- 2 years of World Languages
- 1 year of coursework in the arts

Some differences, for the record:

- Your proposal does not require Algebra 2; ours does.
- Both of the proposals require 2 years of world language; ours goes a step further and recommends 3 years.
- The plan you are considering would require an additional humanities elective, and additional STEM elective, two career/life skill credits, and a demonstration project, as well as physical education and health.

The bottom line is this. Both the plan approved by our Board of Trustees and the plan you are considering would benefit our students and ultimately our state. Our requirements are scheduled to begin in 2015. This bill would become effective in 2017 or 2019.

We recognize that local districts cannot make these changes overnight. Our new admissions standards were approved in such a way as to allow them time to revise course offerings and graduation requirements as necessary. In fact, Danbury is now in the midst of considering revisions to align with our new standards, based on a recommendation by the principal of Danbury High School. Action by the state should certainly do the same.

In our view, the academic standards we have established and those that you are considering will provide what students need to succeed, in college and in life. We look forward to working with you as this bill moves through the legislative process.